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# Machine Readable Records

This issue of the Bulletin is devoted to some of the work now being undertaken in the area of standards. A number of initiatives underway relate to the description of machine readable records in inventories or union lists and the transfer of machine readable records from one system to another. These issues are of major concern from an archival point of view in that they help to provide data in a format for transfer and preservation, and they provide information about data holdings to a wide variety of research communities.

## CULDAT Record Format

As was indicated in the last issue of the *Bulletin*, the CULDAT (Canadian Union List of Machine Readable Data Files) is continuing. During the first phase of the project a draft record standard was developed. Since that time a revised record standard has been developed and discussed (IASSIST 1987). The following is a description of the standard which will be used for the descriptive entries. From the outset, a central consideration in the design of the content and form of the CULDAT MRDF description has been compatibility with existing standards for bibliographic control of computer files. The format has attempted to accommodate, as much as possible, these standards as well as the divergent needs of a variety of applications and products, like a data inventory.

The CULDAT descriptive standard has been limited to those data elements considered most useful in relation to the principal project objective — to establish a centralized source of information on computer files in Canada that will assist Canadian researchers in identifying and locating files of potential use. Data elements for MRDF description fall into six basic categories:

- (1) Bibliographic elements, i.e., those needed to identify a MRDF.
- (2) Descriptive elements to describe the contents of a MRDF.
- (3) Classification elements necessary to group like data files together.
- (4) Technical and physical elements that are needed to access a MRDF.
- (5) Elements required to analyse or use a MRDF.
- (6) Archiving elements to archive and maintain a MRDF.<sup>1</sup>

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For the purposes of CULDAT the two primary categories are the bibliographic and descriptive data elements. Technical and physical information required for accessing computer files, and elements required to use and analyze a file, fall outside the scope of the national union list. This information will be provided by the appropriate data archive at the local level. An exception to this policy is the inclusion of a description of the study methodology, which is considered to be significant descriptive information in the early stages of determining whether a data file is of potential interest. The nature of a computerized inventory renders the general use of classificatory elements unnecessary — the bringing of like MRDFs together is accomplished through the search and retrieval process for each particular usage requirement. Several elements which are classificatory in nature have been included as discrete fields to enable easy partitioning of the data base; for example, the "Type of File" field enables the user to retrieve all numeric time series data files, and then search by other criteria.

A list of the CULDAT data elements, by category, is given below.

## Bibliographic Identity

*Principal Investigator(s)*: This field is used to record the name(s) of the person(s) chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual content of the data file.

*Corporate Investigator(s)*: This field is used to record the name(s) of one or more corporate bodies chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual content of the data file, when there is no named principal investigator.

*Title*: This field is used to record the full title of the MRDF, including the subtitle, alternative title and/or parallel title (title translated in another language).

*Variant Title*: This field is used to record a title that is different from the title given in the Title field and which the cataloguer deems significant as additional identifying information or as an additional access point.

*Edition Statement*: This field is used to record information relating to an edition of a data file that contains differences from other editions.

*Production*: This field records information on the place of MRDF production, the name of the producer and the date of production. The

producer of MRDF is defined as the person or corporate body with the financial and/or administrative responsibility for the physical processes whereby the data file is brought into existence. Production date is defined as the date the file became operational in a machine readable form and available for analysis, processing and possible release to the public.

*Distributor*: The name of the distributor and the order number assigned by a distributor to the MRDF, as applicable, are recorded in this field. The distributor is that person or organization designated by the investigator or producer to reproduce copies of a particular file for distribution.

*Generator*: A generator is a person or corporate body with the responsibility for the physical processes by which a file is converted into machine readable form but whose responsibility does not extend beyond data conversion. The name of the generator is included in this field.

*File Size*: This field contains a statement of the number of parts (i.e., component files) that make up a MRDF, and the number of logical records in each file.

*Series Statement*: If the MRDF is part of a monographic series, this field records the title of the series and the volume or number of the part if the series is numbered.

*Sponsor*: This field is used to record information on the sponsor or funding agencies when the MRDF results from a funded project.

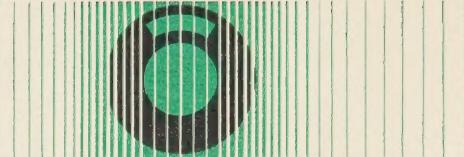
## Descriptive Elements

*Contents Note*: This field is used to record the titles and size of individually named parts (files) of a MRDF in a formatted note. It is also used to give unformatted contents notes for serials specifying important special items with specific titles, unless they are catalogued separately. The number of logical records for each file is given following the title.

*Frequency of Issue*: This field is used only for MRDF issued serially to record data on the frequency of issue.

*Abstract*: The abstract contains a comprehensive description of the purpose, nature and scope of the file, special characteristics of the contents, major subject areas covered, and methodology, as applicable. The abstract includes two subfields, text and variable names.

<sup>1</sup>Dodd, Sue A. *Cataloguing Machine-Readable Data Files: An Interpretive Manual*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1982. 247 p.



**Time Period:** This field is used to record information on the time period to which the data contained in the file refer.

**Number of Cases:** This field gives the number of cases (units of analysis) in the file and the number of variables per case. The units of analysis are named.

**Access Restrictions:** This field is used to record information about restrictions imposed on access to the MRDF. A brief statement of any legal, physical or procedural restrictions, as imposed by the principal investigator or producer, is given here.

### Classification Elements

**Geographic Coverage:** This field is used to record information about the geographic coverage of the MRDF, and contains the names of geographic areas, political jurisdictions and other geographic designations to which data apply.

**Type of File:** This field is used to record information which characterizes the file. In addition to a general descriptor (e.g., text, numeric) more specific information describing the nature of the contents, such as the form or genre of textual material (e.g., law reports) may be recorded in this field.

### Access of MRDF

**Software Dependency:** If a file is dependent upon a particular data base management or statistical software system, this field contains a statement indicating this dependency.

The elements listed are only described briefly. A more detailed description of the elements can be obtained from the Government Archives Division of the National Archives.

### ESRC Seminar Series on the Bibliographic Control of Computer Files

A series of meetings have been held in the United Kingdom in an attempt to bring together the views of representatives of various agencies and individuals from academic, government and private sectors who have a stake in the creation of a national standard for describing and cataloguing computer files. Among the various groups invited to participate were: data producers; information technologists and scientists; librarians; archivists; data and information disseminators; and data users.

The need for a coordinated national cataloguing effort seemed widely accepted. The formation of this seminar series is a response to the need for a coordinated program of action. The group has agreed to continue to meet with the following objectives:

(1) to standardize the cataloguing of computer files in line with the recommendations of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Code (2nd ed.) and the International Standard Bibliographic Description within the MARC format; (2) to seek funds to set up a pilot project to create a union catalogue of the computer readable holdings of the University of Edinburgh and the ESRC Data Archive, with descriptions of software; (3) to formulate and implement a policy of publicity for the project, including incentives and guidelines for producers, cataloguers and users of computer files and to investigate the possibility of setting up a clearing house for the deposit of cataloguing records of computer files.

To pursue these objectives, a number of working groups have been formed to study specific subjects.

- (1) The Working Group on Standards is to investigate the adoption of a MARC record which would accommodate information required by producers and users of computer files in the United Kingdom and facilitate the exchange of information about computer files.
- (2) The Working Group on Implementation is responsible to implement the creation of a trial union catalogue.
- (3) The Working Group on Dissemination will formulate a policy for publicity and incentives and develop guidelines for participating organizations.

Funding has been obtained to continue the work of the seminar series and related working groups. Progress on the adoption of standards is being made and the work of this group is being followed with interest.

authorities and rules and adapt them to archival principles and practices; study the problems of subject indexing of archives and archival finding aids; publish and disseminate the work of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards; and study the mechanisms necessary for the ongoing maintenance and control of descriptive standards once developed.

The first working group to establish standards and rules for the intellectual control of archival material at the fonds d'archives level was appointed and has begun their work. This level of description will include all media, including machine readable records. The working group consists of five media specialists representing textual archives; maps and architectural archives; photographs, paintings, prints and drawings; machine readable archives; and sound and moving image materials. The work of the group is to be completed by March 1988.

### Bureau of Canadian Archivists and Descriptive Standards

Following up the recommendations of the report *Towards Descriptive Standards*, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists has formed a planning committee to oversee the establishment of descriptive standards and rules for the intellectual control of archival materials at four levels — the fonds d'archives, the series, the file and the item. The standards for description at the fonds d'archives level will include all material; the standards developed for the three other levels of description will be specific to the archival medium.

The mandate of the committee is to plan the development of descriptive standards based on accepted archival theory and principles for the Canadian archival profession. As well as the establishment of descriptive standards and rules for the four levels, the committee will work with the Canadian Committee on MARC and the National Library of Canada to adapt the format for archival material; study the existing name

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